

ATTACHMENT #5

JUAN ROBLES INTERVIEW #2

(6 Pages)

Record of Interview

Date and Time: April 5, 2006 from about 1:45 p.m. to 6:45 p.m. (CST).

Location: Office of the U.S. Attorney, 910 Travis St., Suite 1500, Houston, Texas.

Witness: Juan G. Robles, the driver of the Global Limo MCI bus involved in a fatal fire near Wilmer, Texas on September 23, 2005,

Also Present: George Shaffer (the driver's attorney); Ann M. Kessel (Special Agent, U.S. Department of Transportation, Office of Inspector General); and Jose Cano (interpreter). The NTSB investigators conducting the interview were Paula Sind-Prunier and Larry Yohe.

Note: The driver spoke very little English and an interpreter was necessary for questioning. In addition to the interpreter hired by the NTSB, the driver's attorney was also fluent in Spanish. The interview was not taped; the following is an interview summary:

- ✓ Mr. Robles related that another bus driver, Joel Quinones, picked up the bus in Canada in May 2005 and drove it to the MCI facility in Dallas, Texas for 3 days, where certain repairs were made. The first time he saw the MCI Renaissance bus was in San Antonio, the first week in June 2005. (There were two buses going on a charter to California from the Rio Grande Valley area; they met the MCI Renaissance bus in San Antonio where they transferred the passengers and luggage from another bus to the Renaissance.) Mr. Robles was one of 3 drivers on this trip of 2 buses; he and another driver (Rosa) drove the Van Hool; Francisco Sanchez drove the MCI Renaissance on this trip to California. They spent 8 days in California and then returned to Pharr, TX.
- ✓ At some point, he was shown how to operate it by Joel Quinones, who along with a co-driver drove it to California. Mr. Robles related that he was never shown a driver's manual for the Renaissance, and further, that he had never seen a driver's manual for any bus written in Spanish. He further related that what he was shown by Mr. Quinones, basically what the various switches were for he was not given any training on this bus.
- ✓ The first time he drove the MCI Renaissance was to Dallas for repairs. He had taken the bus to Las Vegas. The alternator and battery died on the return trip, near Las Cruces, NM. The alternator was changed out in El Paso, TX.

- ✓ He had been driving the MCI Renaissance fairly regularly and was assigned to take it to Louisiana during Hurricane Katrina, from September 4th through the 18th. On September 4th, while near New Orleans, a drain cock valve for the air tanks broke and he summoned assistance from the MCI mobile repair truck from Dallas. He stated the bus was leaning due to a problem with the ECAS (electronically controlled air suspension), but the mobile repairman was unable to fix it in the field. He also reported a problem with the interior lights coming on intermittently, a problem that occurred on numerous occasions.
- ✓ He drove to a trip to a football game in Dallas Monday night, September 19th. He picked up the bus in Pharr around 5:00 a.m. and arrived in Dallas about 4:30-5:00 p.m. The following morning, he left the hotel at 8:00 a.m. He got back to Pharr on Tuesday night between 5:00-6:00 p.m.
- ✓ Two passengers left the trip, after complaining that there was no A/C. He felt the tires were bad, then. He could see wear/the cords, and uneven wear because of the suspension, and could feel vibration when steering. He could feel the steering shimmy at around 45-50 mph, but it was less noticeable at 55-60 mph. He called and told Maples about the problems with the tires and the complaints. When he arrived, two men hired by Maples met him to change the tires and fix the A/C. They already had the tires there, which they had obtained from George Ramirez. That was Tuesday night, but the tires were actually installed Wednesday afternoon. He stayed at the terminal at Global Limo in a trailer.
- ✓ He started at 5:00 a.m. on Thursday and went to Houston, arriving in Houston at 11:00 a.m. He noticed that steering was a lot better.
- ✓ No pre-trip inspection was required by Maples, and Maples never provided any training in how to conduct a pre-trip inspection. But he would do his own: he would check the engine oil level, tap the tires, etc., because as a driver, he wanted to make sure the bus was okay for the trip.
- ✓ He said it took about 2 hours for the firemen to load the bus. He slept for a while in his seat after he arrived. He got up, went in the facility about ½ hour before leaving and told them he was hungry. He had a fillet of fish.
- ✓ He knew it would be a long trip from watching TV while he was still at Sunrise. He packed an ice chest of water. He was worried about the passengers; an ambulance was in front of the bus for a while. He thought they would continue to follow, but didn't. He got concerned about the volume of traffic and knew he'd have problems. There was someone that spoke some Spanish, so he felt better.
- ✓ Bellaire is inside the loop near the Galleria. He took I-45 North, but it was closed, so he had to take Rt. 59 North. He left at 3:00 p.m., and it took about ½ hour to get around. He came back to I-45 and Comroe/105 to I-45, from the Sunrise facility to Conroe. On the beltway, he was traveling about 65 mph, but when he reached Rt. 59, the slowdown began, north of Houston. Then it was less

than 10 mph, and on 105 there was a lot of traffic. On I-45 at Conroe to Rice/Corsicana, the speeds varied a lot. He got diesel fuel at exit 118 in Huntsville. Traffic was very slow, then after about an hour, it started to dissipate and he was able to go 45 to 50 or 60 because they opened the southbound lanes for northbound traffic. There were a lot of cars broken down, so he had to watch for cars and pedestrians, there were people walking in traffic. He pulled over to load oxygen tanks before Huntsville. He made no other stops between Huntsville and the first flat. He was driving about 65 mph and the tire popped, so he pulled over, looked at the tire, and saw a tear in the tire. He wasn't aware it had left tire marks in the roadway. He said he pulled OFF the roadway to check the tire, but realized it wasn't a good spot. So he continued to drive, searching for an adequate place to stop. He didn't feel anything or sense anything until the tire went flat. Then he felt the bus wobbling.

- ✓ He recalls the head nurse asking for a mile marker but he wasn't aware she was calling 911. After he saw the flat, he drove VERY slowly until he stopped. His intention was to find a good place to pull over. He was moving along very slowly because he could feel it pulling.
- ✓ He is aware of the turning radius of the tag axle, but doesn't know if it "unloads".
- ✓ He didn't look for or notice the ABS light; he was focused on finding a place to pull over. He felt nothing before the tire blew; then he felt resistance, it was harder.
- ✓ Traffic had been going okay; he caused the backup. He said it was 40 minutes to less than an hour before the service truck arrived. Tx-DOT was there. The Rice PD parked behind him. After the tire was fixed, he felt all was okay. He had a brief discussion with the tire man, asking whether he had filled it to 100 psi. The tire guy told him it was okay. He felt bad that the nurse had to pay but he couldn't pay anymore. Maples didn't reimburse him, and he never gave him a credit card. Maples owes him about \$8,000. He thumped the tire and said "100 pounds" and the mechanic told him it was okay. It took about 30 minutes to change the tire, and the mechanic used two jacks. He got the spare from the front, with the assistance of someone from Tx-DOT while they were waiting. He cut his hand on the tire. He did not notice the damage to the rim, but it was dark.
- ✓ Continuing, traffic was moving about 55-60 mph. The first thing that indicated a problem to him was that a guy pulled up next to him and made a hand signal, and he looked back and saw flames in his mirror. He pulled in front of the bus and came out. He was using hand signals from near his truck. He stood up, looked back, and saw flames, and looked to see how to get off to the right of the road.
- ✓ He was familiar with the rubber "fill plug" on other vehicles but he never checked it on the MCI. He checked the lug nuts in his walk-around, visually. He thinks he would have noticed a missing "fill plug" on the wheel. He never had a bad wheel bearing before. As far as he knew, the tag axle had ever been impacted.

- ✓ He knew how [oil bath] wheel bearings were lubricated, but never checked the oil level on any bus and never added oil to the wheel bearing hub cavities. During his walk-around inspection, he never looked under the bus to check for wheel seal leaks, but said this he would have noticed if it was leaking from the outside.
- ✓ He had never removed the fire extinguisher before. He had no training in using it. Usually (on other buses) they carry it in the door compartment. He had never removed it from the MCI, where it is under a seat.
- ✓ The speedometer on the bus is in kilometers.
- ✓ He had a yellow sheet in the bus that he used to keep track of distances. Maples told him to keep track of mileage in kilometers, and then convert it to miles. Maples never asked for driving time, although he did keep track of time while in Louisiana for FEMA. He sent it to Maples. The three buses sent it together so Maples could bill FEMA. He maintained a logbook in Louisiana.
- ✓ The game ended and they got back to the hotel between 11:30 p.m. – 12:00 a.m. He went to sleep after a shower, about ½ hour after arriving. He awoke around 7:00 a.m. and departed at 8:00 a.m. He had a continental breakfast at the hotel. He drove from Dallas to San Antonio, arriving around 12:30 p.m. He ate lunch from 12:30-1:30 p.m., at which time he departed for Pharr. He arrived in Pharr around 6:00 p.m. on September 20th. He went to dinner around 8:00 p.m. and went to sleep around 10:00 or 10:30 p.m. He slept fine. He awoke at 4:30 a.m. with an alarm clock. He does not snore, nor use medications or alcohol to promote sleep. He showered, prepared the bus, and left the office at 5:00 a.m. Arrived in Houston at 10:30 or 11:00 a.m.
- ✓ He had been on standby on Wednesday. He reported at 1:00 p.m., awoke at 8:00 or 9:00 a.m. He had no breakfast, just lunch. Maples said for him to check back at 6:00 p.m. He ate around 8:00 p.m. He went to sleep around 10:00-10:30 p.m.
- ✓ He was cited for speeding in a construction zone near Brownsville (San Benito County) in April or so. He was put Out of Service on March 1.
- ✓ On February 12th, he received no citation. He received a warning because he had no fire extinguisher. He pulled over to check the bus. It was not the MCI, it was #711, an Eagle.
- ✓ In August, he was in Laredo (Webb County). The bus had no A/C. They had to switch buses, and as a result, they were running late. He was stopped for speeding and put out of service. He was told there was a logbook problem. He didn't work for the week so he hadn't filled it out. He was told no driving for 8 or 10 hours. He stayed on the bus as a passenger, and the other driver took over the driving. He didn't drive until the following week.
- ✓ When asked if he was tired during the drive from Bellaire to Dallas, he replied that it was his "mission to finish". He denied falling asleep or even coming close,

repeating that it was his “responsibility” to stay awake. He made calls on his cell phone to the other two drivers (Jose Quinones and Rosa) but not Sanchez. He told them he couldn’t believe what was going on with the traffic for the past several hours. He commented on how unusual it was. He was worried about the passengers. He said it was “very tense” with people sitting in traffic, trying to get to their destination, and wondering when. He was worried whether he’d have another trip once he got to Dallas.

- ✓ He insisted that he would have pulled over if he was too tired. He’s done it before with passengers aboard. He was ready to assist the passengers, and he would pull over if needed to. He stopped in Huntsville and the nurse bought refreshments for the passengers.
- ✓ The roof hatch pushes up and lays over on its back. It won’t stay up by itself. For the football trip, he put a wedge in it because the A/C wasn’t working. He opened the first one and threw it open at the time of the fire.
- ✓ He opened Windows, two, but they closed by themselves because there’s no way to hold them open.
- ✓ After he was stopped by the pickup truck he pulled over and got out to see and saw the fire. He ran inside to get the fire extinguisher. He went to go flag/pull over help, by waving his arms. People stopped immediately. He went back on the bus, and turned the engine off. He’s not sure if he did anything else first. He didn’t take anyone off himself--- he helped take some off. The staff and about 4-5 of the passengers could walk off. They were helping to get people off. There was heat, a “swoosh” noise, and thick black smoke, so the rescuers had to back off, even before the explosions. He helped 3-4 people. He felt dizzy from the smoke.

END OF INTERVIEW